

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Previously Presented) A communication method using a first access (3)providing a plurality of information channels including one information channel (4) for transmitting voice and first data and having at least one signaling channel (5) for transmitting signaling signals and second data relating to at least one of said access and said first data, said method further comprising the step of providing at least one additional signaling channel in a signaling path of a second access which also provides a plurality of information channels, said additional signaling channel being on a different physical medium from said first signaling channel and for use in conjunction with said one information channel, determining an order of priority of the use of the signaling channels, and assigning the highest priority functional signaling channel to the first access, wherein said step of providing at least one additional signaling channel comprises the step of forming said additional signaling channel from a channel which can be used as an information channel of said second access.

2. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the information channel for transmitting voice and first data is on a different physical medium from at least one of the signaling channels (5,9,10).

3. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the operational status of the highest priority signaling channel is regularly tested (17) when said highest priority signaling channel is not in service.

4. (Currently Amended) A communication method using a first access (3) including ~~at least one~~ a plurality of information ~~channel~~ channels (4) for transmitting voice and first data and one signaling channel for transmitting signaling signals and second data relating to at least one of said access and said first data, said method further comprising the step of providing at least one additional signaling channel for use in conjunction with at least one of said ~~one~~ information ~~channel~~ channels, determining an order of priority of the use of the signaling channels, and assigning the highest priority functional signaling channel to the access, said method further comprising the step of ~~neutralizing at least one, but less than all,~~ inhibiting functionality of a subset of said information channels if the signaling channel in service is ~~not sufficiently functional~~ congested.

5. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that each said access provides thirty information channels.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Canceled)

8. (Canceled)

9. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein said first and second accesses are each ISDN accesses having B channels for information and a D channel for signaling, and wherein a B channel of said second access is converted to said additional signaling channel.

10. (Canceled)

11. (New) A method according to claim 4, wherein said step of inhibiting functionality comprises rendering said subset of said information channels unavailable for use in setting up calls.

12. (New) A method according to claim 4, wherein said step of inhibiting functionality comprises rendering said subset of said information channels unavailable for use in modifying calls that have already been set up.

13. (New) A method according to claim 4, wherein said congested signaling channel is incapable of managing all signaling signal transmissions for all information channels of said first access.